

**Milton Marks “Little Hoover” Commission on
California State Government Organization and Economy**

**Public Hearing on Immigrant Integration
March 22, 2001 – Room 437, State Capitol,
Sacramento, California**

Introduction to the Immigrant Policy Project

The Immigrant Policy Project serves six national organizations representing state and local government, known as “The State and Local Coalition on Immigration.” This is a collaborative effort of The National Governors’ Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Association of Counties, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National League of Cities, and the American Public Human Services Association. Since the early 1980s, these organizations have worked individually and jointly to advance the state and local perspective on immigration before Congress and the Administration through correspondence, issue briefings, and testimony. Federal immigration decisions were recognized to have direct and indirect effects on state and local governments in the form of their budgets; the composition of their citizenry; the utilization and quality of their services; and the general social, political, and economic character of their communities.

The Immigrant Policy Project was created in 1992 as a policy research and education center, with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The Foundation sought to create a discipline known as “immigrant policy”: while the federal government has jurisdiction over *immigration policy*, i.e., the terms and conditions for entering into the country, states and localities were becoming increasingly responsible for *immigrant policy*, the policies that help newcomers assimilate into the country’s economic, social, and civic life. Our initial set of regional meetings brought together state and local policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and immigrants to provide a common base of understanding, an “Immigration 101” of federal legislation and state and local roles, and also to provide an opportunity to identify the current issues of concern for the various participants. We published briefing papers on employment/job training, health care, and community relations, federal legislation and state and local programs, including a study demonstrating the marked drop-off in federal funding for the partnership of resettling immigrants and refugees. We also began reporting on federal, state, and local legislation and best practices in immigrant policy. During the welfare reform debates from 1995-1997, we provided research and analysis on the implications for states and localities and for the immigrant populations affected. Most recently, the Project has begun work on refugee and immigrant integration.

Current Immigrant/Immigrant Policy Trends

The national trends in immigration/immigrant policy can be characterized as “the 4 Ds”: demographics; distribution; devolution; and disparities.

Demographics. It is now commonly recognized that the United States is in the midst of the largest wave of immigration since the turn of the last century, and 2000 Census estimates surprise us with higher than expected population counts. Though absolute numbers compare to that of 100 years ago, the proportion of immigrants to natives is less than that peak: 10% in 2000 compared to 13% in 1900. (The Census estimates 28.4 million foreign-born in a total U.S. population of 281 million

– March 2000 CPS data and early estimates from the 2000 census). California is at the forefront of this population shift, with nearly 1 in 4 California residents foreign-born.

Distribution. Immigrants traditionally come to the top 6 states: More than 2/3 of all immigrants live in California, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey and Illinois. However, a new trend for the nation is the increasing numbers of immigrants settling in nontraditional urban and rural receiving communities, such as the southern and Midwestern states, following job opportunities in agricultural and meatpacking industries. During the 1990s, for example, the Hispanic population more than doubled in states such as Arkansas, Georgia, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Devolution. The 1996 federal welfare law, like the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, protected the federal government from some of its' own decisions. The recent legislation bars legal immigrants from federal public means-tested benefits for five years (SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, SCHIP, and TANF.) This applies to legal immigrants who enter the United States after the law was enacted on August 22, 1996. The reductions in benefit eligibility for immigrants were primarily a cost-saving measure, accounting for \$24 billion in cuts. In 1997 and 1998, state and local policymakers were successful in persuading Congress to restore certain benefits for particularly vulnerable populations, primarily in the SSI and food stamps programs, rescinding about \$12 billion of the retroactive cuts for legal immigrants and refugees already residing in the U.S. in August 1996. In addition, a number of states decided to extend medical assistance and food stamps to their immigrant residents, and applied TANF maintenance-of-effort funds to assisting legal immigrant families become self-sufficient. The continuing concern of state and local policymakers is that legal immigrants, in times of accident or layoff, may be forced to rely on state and local funded emergency programs with no federal partnership. And that there is no clear solution for the disconnect between costs of resettlement and federal support. 2/3 of revenues from immigrants flows to federal level (income taxes), while 2/3 of services borne by state and local government (education, health care)

Disparities. Immigrant caseload reduction in TANF, Medicaid, and food stamps has far exceeded that of the native-born population. Children in immigrant families, even though eligible, are often not becoming enrolled in the new SCHIP program. Because many immigrant families are of mixed status, and fears of deportation for accepting public assistance remain high, the United States may face a two-tier health and support network between its foreign-born and native-born populations, even for legal immigrant families with eligible citizen children.

The public policy debate in the United States has often been polarized around the numbers of immigrants admitted and the services (and costs of those services) received. Americans display an historical ambivalence toward newcomers – pride in our immigrant history but concerns about poverty and threats to American culture. Our first Project publication noted – how will health and social service programs adjust to a multilingual, multicultural population? How will school systems adapt to the needs of children from 100 different countries? How can state and local officials ensure that public services and benefits are distributed equitably among the members of the community?

New discussions are emerging around integration and new American communities that note the strengths and contributions of immigrants and examine ways to capitalize on diversity for economic, social, and civic reasons. Since the height of the welfare debate, the climate has

changed, largely the result of an economic boom with the need for workers in a range of industries (high-tech, service industries, agriculture, meatpacking, furniture, garment industries), but also the recognition that Census2000 shows that newcomers are likely to shape our future civic and political life.

Recent State Integration Activities

Illinois. The Illinois Immigrant Policy Project Roundtable Initiative has a steering committee composed of resettlement agencies, the state Department of Human Services, state Department of Education, immigrant organizations, researchers, and foundations that will plan four roundtables on 1) immigration policy and law; 2) workforce issues; 3) education; and 4) health and human services. In previous years, the Illinois Immigrant Policy Project supported 8 studies on topics such as a profile of Chicago's immigrant community; estimated costs of providing welfare and education; citizenship needs; public service use; and how immigration is revitalizing America's Midwest, among others, that influenced Illinois' legislative, administrative and private sector responses to the needs of immigrants.

The Nebraska legislature passed LB 1363 in March 2000 to set up a task force on the productive integration of the immigrant workforce population. The task force will review public services, including education, health care, and housing; define the function of the state in working toward the integration of immigrants and their new communities; and identify effective programs.

In Iowa, the Community Work Group of the Governor's Strategic Planning Council established a Subcommittee on Diversity/Immigration to examine issues related to immigrants: some of the action items include protecting immigrants/refugees from exploitation; creating a handbook for immigrants; and creating model community programs.

Georgia. Governor Barnes is planning commissions on Asian and Hispanic affairs to serve as a bridge between immigrant communities and government offices.

California. The County of Santa Clara conducted an 18 month long study on a needs assessment of the county's refugees and immigrants with surveys, focus groups and questionnaires. The findings were reported in a December 2000 "summit" on immigrant needs and contributions, with implementation to come in the year 2001. Participants in the conference included advocates, county officials, school district leaders, and members of the high tech community. Recommendations were made for economic empowerment; education; family support; health issues; and legal issues.

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